Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund

Enhancing the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund is a key component of the President's Lands Legacy Initiative during FY 2001. Under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act, funds are provided to States and territories for species and habitat recovery actions on non-federal lands. This assistance is crucial because most listed species depend on habitat on State and private lands. Section 6 grants assist States and territories in building partnerships. Grants also provide funding for monitoring delisted species and thus facilitate the transition of authority from the Service to States and territories.

Conservation Grants

Conservation Grants provide financial assistance to States and territories to implement conservation projects for species at risk. States and territories contribute 25 percent of the estimated program-cost of approved projects, or 10 percent when two or more States or territories implement a joint project. Grants reimburse the balance of the estimated program-costs. Requests for financial assistance by States and territories for these activities greatly exceed available funds. Conservation grants have funded the following projects.

Florida Marine Turtle Protection Program

Section 6 funding provides vital support for the marine turtle protection program of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Florida has the largest diversity and abundance of sea turtle nesting in the continental United States, areas that are also subject to intense pressure from coastal development.

State law requires the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to ensure that coastal construction minimizes impacts to marine turtles, their nests, and hatchlings, as well as their nesting habitat. Under the Recovery Plan, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection should assess marine turtle nesting on the State's beaches and minimize construction-related impacts. The marine turtle protection program is uniquely suited for developing and implementing research-based management recommendations that maximize conservation as the uplands landward of nesting beaches are developed. Section 6 funds are used for sea turtle assessments through nesting beach surveys.

Protected by the Endangered Species Act, green sea turtles (above), loggerheads, leatherbacks, hawksbills, and even occasionally Kemp's ridleys nest on beaches in the United States. Coastal development is a major threat by eliminating nesting habitat. Sea turtles also depend on coastal waters for foraging and migration. Photo by Bob Dittrick/USFWS

Conservation of Endangered Ozark Cave Species and Ecosystems

Through the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Oklahoma Nature Conservancy, and Fish and Wildlife Service have made significant progress in protecting the fragile Ozark karst ecosystem and recovery of the endangered Ozark big-eared bat, gray bat, and Ozark cavefish.

This conservation effort would not have been possible without a dedicated, volunteer workforce of local grotto organizations, other cave experts, private citizens, and landowners. Using Section 6 funding, the dynamic partnership has constructed bat-friendly gates at the entrances to nine caves and fenced another cave entrance.

All of these caves provide essential habitat for the Ozark cave species. Human disturbance is a major threat to the survival of bats, especially during periods of hibernation and breeding, when energy lost by this disruption could prevent them from breeding. Gates and fences prevent human entry to the caves.

Through other programs such as the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife, these same partners, in addition to the U.S. Forest Service and Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, have expanded the cave-gating program to other important caves in Oklahoma and Arkansas. The overall

In isolated cave ecosystems, species like this threatened Ozark cavefish ultimately rely on bats to bring in nutrients from outside the cave. Consequently, recovery of the endangered Ozark big-eared bat can also benefit the cavefish and a host of other species. USFWS photo

results of this comprehensive project is paying off for the recovery of rare Ozark species. The number of gray bats in maternity colonies in Oklahoma has increased from 56,600 in 1981 to more than 150,000 in 1999. Gray bats are now returning to gated caves where they have been absent for many years. For the first time since listing in 1979, Ozark big-eared populations are now stabilized, and new sites continue to be found.

Lake Wales Ridge Plants (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services)
Approximately 40 species of plants that occur on the ridges of central and coastal Florida are found nowhere else in the world. Many of these rare and endemic plants are found at Lake Wales Ridge. With the use of Section 6 funding, the State of Florida continues to monitor marked populations and mark additional populations of 13 listed species of plants that occur at Lake Arbukcle State Forest and Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, implement management plans and monitor the results.

Expanding the Conservation Grants Program
During FY 2001, the Service is proposing to expand the Grants to the States program to provide additional financial and technical assistance to integrate species conservation into local land-use planning. Grants will provide funding for States to develop and implement Habitat Conservation Plans, conserve species through use of Safe Harbor Agreements and Candidate Conservation Agreements, and acquire land in support of species recovery.

Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Grants
Regional, multiple species HCPs enable local governments to incorporate species conservation into local land use planning, which streamlines the project approval process and facilitates economic development while conserving species and habitats. These complex regional, multiple species HCPs depend on adequate funding for development and implementation. The HCP Grants program provides funding to States to develop HCPs, implement conservation actions called for in HCPs, and verify their effectiveness. Grants do not fund the mitigation required of the HCP applicant; instead, they support conservation actions by the State or local governments that complement mitigation.

Safe Harbor Grants
Voluntary cooperation of landowners is essential for recovery of listed species on private, State and other non-federal lands. Safe Harbor Agreements have proven extremely effective in encouraging non-federal landowners to enhance or improve habitat for threatened and endangered species on their property. With increased funding and a greater role for the States in implementing the policy, the success of existing Safe Harbor Agreements can be expanded. The program emphasizes funding for statewide or rangewide agreements and local and private landowner agreements associated with these efforts.

Candidate Conservation Agreement Grants
Candidate Conservation Agreement grants provide funding to the States for planning, developing, and implementing Candidate Conservation Agreements to conserve candidate and proposed species on State, private, and other non-federal lands. Early conservation maintains land use and development flexibility for landowners, and in some cases make listing unnecessary.

In addition, taking action before a species and its habitat are critically imperiled makes it more likely that simpler, more cost-effective conservation options will still be available and that conservation will be successful. The Candidate Conservation program emphasizes funding for statewide or rangewide agreements and local and private landowner agreements associated with these efforts. The demand for agreements is greatly expanding with the completion of our Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances Policy. This policy provides increased incentives to non-federal landowners to conserve candidate, proposed, or other non-listed species on non-federal lands by assuring landowners that no additional conservation measures will be required of them should the candidate species be listed in the future.

Recovery Land Acquisition Grants
Land acquisition is often an essential element of a comprehensive plan to recover listed species. Land acquisition is increasingly costly; often neither the Service nor States have the necessary resources to acquire key acreage before important habitat values are

The Habitat Conservation Planning Land Acquisition program is helping to acquire habitat for endangered species such as the golden-cheeked warbler while development proceeds in the rapidly-growing area of Austin, Texas. USFWS photo

permanently lost. The Recovery Land Acquisition Grants program provides funding to States to acquire lands that support approved recovery plans.

Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition

The Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition program funds land acquisitions that complement but do not replace the mitigation responsibilities of approved Habitat Conservation Plans. The acquisitions have important benefits for listed, proposed, and candidate species and their ecosystems. Because of their authorities and close working relationships with local governments and landowners, States and territories use Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Funds to acquire such complementary lands.

Projects funded by the Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Program in Fiscal Year 1999 include the following:

Coachella Valley (California)—$1,000,000
The funds will secure lands to provide the necessary sand source corridors to maintain sand dunes in the existing preserve. Once a cooperative agreement is developed with the grant-recipient and prices are negotiated with willing sellers, the State will acquire lands in fee-title. Based upon current land values, funds will buy approximately 200 acres.

Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (California)—$1,000,000
The funds will purchase lands in the Vail Lake area that complete the core reserve system and conserve two of the Stephens' kangaroo rat populations outside the HCP planning area. Once a cooperative agreement is developed with the grant recipient, and prices are negotiated with willing sellers, the State will acquire lands in fee-title. Land prices vary widely (estimates are $700 to $8,300 per acre). The number of acres purchased will depend on negotiated prices and the amount of non-federal match.

Balcones (Texas)—$1,500,000
In Fiscal Year 1999, Travis County, Texas, a permittee on the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve permit and accompanying Habitat Conservation Plan, received $1.5 million to complement ongoing habitat preservation efforts for two endangered migratory songbirds, the golden-cheeked warbler and the black-capped vireo, as well as six cave/karst endangered invertebrates. Rapid development in the Greater Austin area threatens the oak/juniper woodlands and cave habitat on which these species depend. The population expansion in the area fueling the high tech industries there is bringing pressure from attendant suburban development and recreational needs and activities. The city of Austin and Travis County, to their credit, have been able to place more than 24,000 acres of the 30,428 acres of habitat required for the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve less than four years into their 30 year HCP permit.

Alabama/Florida Sea Turtle (Alabama, Florida)—$1,500,000
The funds will acquire lands in fee-title or to acquire easements. The States will provide matching funds to acquire land.

Washington County (Utah)—$1,000,000
The funds will continue the Service's commitment to acquire land under this HCP for the desert tortoise, peregrine falcon and bald eagle, along with 30 other listed and candidate species. The Service is working with the State of Utah to add the acquired land to Snow Canyon State Park.

Conservation Planning Assistance

Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, and Candidate Conservation Agreements require integrating proposed land-use activities, especially development, with species protection. Habitat Conservation Plans, in particular, have become more than a project-specific mechanism to ensure conservation and provide for economic growth. They have become a means of enfranchising stakeholders through early and continuing participation in charting the long-term uses of land and water. As these conservation tools increase in popularity, the Service's workload increases. Additional staffing is needed to deliver this expanded grant program. Funding requested for Conservation Planning Assistance will allow the Service to carry out these responsibilities and provide technical assistance to States, communities, and landowners.